Chapter 2

The Indian Ecumenical Conference

Native people in the Americas first encountered Christian missionaries in 1493 when Christopher Columbus returned to the Caribbean with five *religiosos.* Columbus had written in his log the year before that the Arawaks "seem to have no religion" and were "a people who can be made free and converted to our Holy Faith more by love than by force."[1] When he sailed for his second voyage Columbus carried with him the papal bull "Inter Caetera," which granted to Columbus and his patrons "all those lands and islands" and charged him with certain responsibilities:

> Furthermore we command you in the virtue of holy obedience (as you have promised, and as we doubt not you will do upon mere devotion and princely magnanimity) to send to the said firm lands and islands, honest, virtuous, and learned men, such as fear God, and are able to instruct the inhabitants in the Catholic faith and good manners, applying all their possible diligence in the premises.[2]

Noble aspirations notwithstanding, Columbus's real intentions on his second voyage are evident in the fact that these five Christian monks were accompanied by more than 1,200 colonists and "a large band of soldiers complete with cuirasses, crossbows, arquebuses, and cannon."[3] This initial meeting between indigenous and Christian religious traditions set the stage for the next five centuries of religious interaction, as native people struggled to understand and to appreciate a religious tradition which articulated a message of love, charity and transcendent spirituality while often granting tacit or explicit approval to widespread dispossession, slavery and murder. Native people who participated in the 1980 conference of Theology in the Americas expressed it this way:

> To us, it became evident at the outset of our contact with European peoples that their Way of Life possessed an apocalyptic separation between its creed and its deed.[4]

Native religious leaders soon learned that their spiritual authority would be denigrated, challenged, and sometimes supplanted by European Christian missionaries, who began entering present-day Canada and the United States early in the sixteenth century. Franciscan monks accompanying Coronado's expedition set up the first missions in the Southwest in 1540; similar efforts were also underway in Spanish Florida during this period. French Jesuits made their presence known in the Saint Lawrence Valley in 1534, though permanent missions were not established in the Northeast until more than seventy years later.[5]

> The first recorded presentation of Christian teaching to Indians within the present boundaries of Canada took place at Gaspe on 20 July 1534, when Jacques Cartier erected a cross and indicated as well as he could to visiting Iroquoians from Stadacona, now Quebec, that they should look to it for their redemption. In the following year his crew harangued the villagers of Stadacona on the folly of their beliefs and elicited in response what they interpreted as a mass request for baptism.[6]

Most European Christian organizations and movements maintained their expansionistic, exclusionistic and paternalistic orientation toward native people until the second half of the twentieth century. Native people were viewed (and still are, by some Christian groups) as missiological objects, religious paupers in need of spiritual liberation who constitute pathetic but mutable obstacles to the inevitable progress of Christian civilization.

Euro-American Christian attitudes toward the global missionary enterprise began to change following World War II in response to several developments: growing anti-colonial sentiment, the demise of the "Christendom" worldview, maturing appreciation for religious pluralism, the rise of the Christian ecumenical movement, and renewed concern for social justice. Some mainline denominations in Canada began to discuss ways of reforming their "Indian work" during the 1940s, but it was not until native activists made their voices heard in the late sixties that church leaders were prompted to action. The first treaty Indian in Canadian history to become a priest was ordained by the Catholic Church in 1963, and by 1966 the United Church of Canada was supporting several urban drop-in centers that were staffed by native people. John Webster Grant suggested that these and other developments made the mainline churches "quick to respond" to native people's criticisms, and that the Anglican Church of Canada "did a good deal of the pioneering."[7]

The Anglican Church of Canada

Delegates at the 1965 General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada approved a resolution calling for a "pilot project to discover effective means of working with Indian communities within the context of community development."[8] Edward Scott, Bishop of Kootenay, authored "A Position Paper Concerning the Stance of the Anglican Church to Indian Work" in 1966; he argued that

> the situation relating to Indian people in Canada has changed so drastically in recent years that it is now necessary for the Anglican Church to re-think its approach to Indian work and that this re-thinking must relate to goals, methods of work, and to general attitudes.

Scott concluded the position paper by stating that he was personally convinced:

> 1. That we must see our task that of seeking to make possible the development of creative Indian leadership in the widest sense of the term and not be concerned with mere institutional membership or "in Church" leaders.
>
> 2. That we must rejoice in the developing independent and direct action of Indian people and encourage and support it in every way possible striving to help it to become more and more responsible in character.
>
> 3. That we must strive to help our total Church membership to become conscious of the vital part which their attitudes play in influencing the attitudes of Indian people both to white culture and to the Church.
>
> 4. That we will be apt to do more harm than good if we are not willing to enter into close cooperation with other Churches, and both community and government agencies.[9]

The same year, John Melling (a Quaker) submitted to the Anglican Church his manuscript analyzing the native situation in Canada. Melling, Professor of Political Science at McMaster University and the first Executive Director of the Indian-Eskimo Association of

Canada, surveyed the past and present of native-white relations and offered specific recommendations for government and church roles in native community development. Melling's book was published jointly by the Anglican Church and the United Church of Canada, with the support of nine other denominations and organizations, and was the first interdenominational publication on Canadian native issues. Right to a Future was released in 1967, Canada's Centennial Year, with Bishop Scott providing the Preface.[10]

Anglican support for native self-determination was reiterated in the "Centennial Profile of Indians and Eskimos," which was presented to delegates at the 1967 General Synod in Ottawa. Hugh McCullum later argued that while the report's suggestions

> sound mild in the context of [1975's] more militant demands by Native organizations, . . . in the light of Canada's Centennial year, given the essential conservatism of the churches, they were enlightened and forward-looking, clearing the way for today's more sincere support.[11]

A group of "concerned people" at the General Synod pushed for a more detailed study of the situation, and delegates responded by passing a motion initiating a three-phase process involving research, policy and implementation. A budget of $40,000 was approved to fund the preparation of a detailed needs assessment, to be followed by a two-year project, beginning in 1969, "to enable Indians to discuss their own proposals for self-determination."[12]

The Canadian Conference on Church and Society was held in Montreal in May 1968, on the theme "Christian Conscience and

Poverty." One of those present was Charles Hendry, Director of the School of Social Work at the University of Toronto, who later wrote that the experience made him "acutely aware that the native people of Canada are in serious trouble." In September of that year the Program Committee of the Anglican Church asked Hendry who might prepare the report requested by the General Synod; he accepted the assignment himself, on the condition that "the analysis and the orientation be ecumenical in spirit." Hendry was given an extensive set of questionnaires and surveys on Anglican Church policies and programs among native people. He was assisted in the five-month project by research associates Francis Bregha, George Mortimore and Hubert Campfens.[13]

Hendry's multidisciplinary, "action-oriented" report was released in 1969 as Beyond Traplines: Does the Church Really Care? The Anglican monthly newspaper Canadian Churchman devoted much of its May issue to coverage of "the Hendry Report" and its implications for the church. One of the newspaper's columnists expressed his mildly reactionary dissent, suggesting that the Anglican Church should continue in its "essentially protective" stance toward native people, but most contributors welcomed the carefully researched study. The Hendry Report provided a detailed account of the problems facing native people and the involvement of Christian churches and missionaries in these problems, and suggested a combination of "organized public pressure and person-to-person humanitarian services." It concluded with nine specific recommendations for attitudinal and programmatic changes. The first recommendation stated that

> Top priority must be directed to changes in basic attitudes, especially toward native peoples, but also attitudes toward other churches working with native peoples and toward other agencies, including government. . . . The most fundamental need in this realignment of attitudes, which calls for an explicit reformulation of goals, is to find effective ways of respecting and releasing the resources of indigenous leadership. . . .

Hendry considered his last recommendation to be the most important:

> Above all, it is recommended that some new facility be created, both within the Anglican Church of Canada and ecumenically, to implement the recommendations of this Report with particular care being taken to involve native people and specialists, some of whom may be outside the church, when their expertise is needed.

Rev. John (Ian) MacKenzie praised the Hendry Report for recognizing and respecting "the underlying modes of thought, styles of life and values of native communities."[14]

MacKenzie, a resource person for the Institute for Indian Studies at Rochdale College in Toronto and President of the Ontario Division of the Indian-Eskimo Association, was considered by Anglicans to be "one of the few persons in Canada the Indians can trust." He was hired to conduct a series of twenty consultations with native leaders throughout Canada and the United States in order to solicit their feedback on the Hendry Report while it was still in manuscript form. MacKenzie found that

> While Hendry sometimes betrays his non-Indian assumptions--which prompted one Indian to describe Beyond Traplines as a white report--his analysis and recommendations provide the basis for constructive changes for church and state.

MacKenzie's background also helped him to appreciate--better than most non-natives--the far-reaching implications of some of Hendry's recommendations. Suggesting that the churches must listen to native people may lead to changes in church polity and public policy, but "hearing them demands that we examine fundamental questions about the nature of Christianity" as well.

> Most Indians tell me that Christianity in theory is not at variance with Indians, but that its practice is something else. Many Indians have consistently suggested to me that the best thing the church could do is live what it preaches. They say we should begin to read the Bible, live the Gospel and perhaps learn from Indians about the meaning of the Christian life.[15]

The May 1969 issue of Canadian Churchman also reported, in developments that cannot be considered entirely coincidental, that the Anglican Church had decided to end its involvement in native education. After nearly a century of work and sixty years of receiving government financial support, the twelve remaining Anglican residential schools were to be turned over to the federal government by March 1970.[16]

Beyond Traplines was formally only a committee-level document, but it was published in paperback form by the Anglican Church so that the entire church constituency would have access to it; it ended up being widely discussed in the press and on radio and television. The Hendry Report was presented to the General Synod in August 1969 in Sudbury, Ontario, where eight native people were among the delegates. The meeting opened with an address by Dave Courchene, President of the Manitoba Indian Brotherhood, who criticized the Canadian government's recently released "White Paper" on Canadian native affairs. Courchene accused the churches of "both Christian paternalism and competitive conversion" and called for action on several fronts: cultural awareness, public policy, and financial assistance.

> The Church should consider re-directing church foreign aid programs to assist Indian organizations in seeking solutions to the problems of social and economic inequality. It is reasonable, I think, that some of the money generated for the betterment of mankind should be concentrated on the betterment of those from whom this country was taken. This soil is the well from which your wealth springs, is it not valid that those who have been deprived of participation should be helped first.

Delegates also heard from Abenakis singer/filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin and Kwakiutl Anglican priest Ernest Willie, who saw the Hendry Report and its reception by the General Synod as reason for hope that white Canadians "might become able to rise above your confusion and misconceptions." Willie declared that "it is high time the church realized that my people are human beings worthy of dignity and respect who, because of their past treatment, more than ever before need a friend."[17]

General Synod delegates approved all nine recommendations of the Hendry Report in a resolution calling for "radical changes" in church policy, and they even added an amendment calling for immediate implementation. The resolution was moved by Metis priest Adam Cuthand, who called this "the first time in the history of General Synod that native people have been allowed to express their own views." In the first test of their newfound progressivism, delegates were then asked to approve a resolution supporting the National Indian Brotherhood, a native advocacy organization formed in 1968 "without missionary assistance and against some missionary opposition." This resolution also passed; it was moved by Bishop Scott and seconded by Rev. Andrew Ahenakew, a Cree from northern Saskatchewan.[18]

The National Executive Committee of the Anglican Church moved quickly to reallocate staff and financial resources; in October they appointed Canon Trevor Jones to coordinate implementation of the Hendry Report recommendations. Jones, formerly the head of the Missionary Society of the Canadian Church (which administered the Anglican residential schools), had served as a consultant on native issues with a variety of organizations including the Institute for Indian Studies and the Indian-Eskimo Association. Canon John Bothwell also formed a task force to work with Jones and appointed several native people to it, including Ahenakew, Rev. Redfern Loutitt from the Diocese of Moosonee, and Carol Wabigigig, founder of the Institute for Indian Studies. The Primate's World Relief Fund was renamed the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund to reflect its new orientation.[19]

Funding available in 1969 for Hendry Report implementation was spent on arranging meetings with native leaders. Jones and

MacKenzie worked together to maintain close contact with "Indian organizations and Indian parishes, consulting them on how they want us to work." Leaders of the National Indian Brotherhood (including John Snow, newly elected Chief of the Wesley Band of the Stoney Indians and Secretary of the Indian Association of Alberta) were asked how the churches could best support their work; along with financial support and professional expertise, the brotherhoods suggested that the Anglicans "set up a meeting involving church officials and provincial native leaders to make sure church activity would be related to native needs." The Anglican Church responded with a $10,000 grant to the National Indian Brotherhood, which was later matched by the United Church of Canada. The Diocese of Saskatchewan appointed Ahenakew as Archdeacon and special liaison between native people and non-natives, and also supported a proposal by the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians for an Indian Cultural Centre at the University of Saskatchewan. Hendry Report funding for 1970 came from a church-wide Lenten appeal, "Share Canada," and by mid-1970 the Anglican Church was acting on six of the nine Hendry Report recommendations. Jones pushed the church to redefine its role in native communities and, echoing contemporary theological developments in the United States (James Cone) and Latin America (Gustavo Gutierrez), said that "the key to this redefinition lies in the theology and sociology of liberation."[20]

Canadian Churchman again devoted a monthly issue to "Indians and the Church" in March 1970; in the cover story, editor Ronald Fellows declared: "Let's play Anglicans and Indians." Harold

Cardinal's The Unjust Society had just been published and was having much the same impact in Canada that Vine Deloria's Custer Died for Your Sins was having in the United States; both books articulated scathing indictments of the treatment of native people by government, church and society.[21] Anglicans were encouraged to support native causes by writing to members of parliament after reading the government's "Statement on Indian Policy" and Bulletin 201, a collection of native responses to the new Policy, published by the Social Action Unit of the Anglican Church.[22] The May issue of Canadian Churchman featured a short interview with Cherokee anthropologist Robert Thomas, Director of the Carnegie Cross-Cultural Project at the University of Chicago and a Resource Person at the Institute for Indian Studies, as part of a special issue on pollution; Thomas commented on the cultural roots of the environmental crisis.[23]

Meanwhile, MacKenzie held planning meetings with about twelve native leaders in Manitoba, Missouri and Oklahoma. Ahenakew recalled his experience at a meeting in Winnipeg with traditional religious leaders; "I was picked, I didn't want to join up."

> One Indian from Poundmaker Reserve spoke with a harsh tongue and he said, "No more of these white-collared clergy in our circle. They destroyed us so much with all that condemnation." I happen to sit there for two days listening to this kind of talk, and I was hurt right to the core of my heart. There was one moment there where I thought I would just get up and go home. But then something compelled me to stay. . . . Anyway, I survived that ordeal. I stayed there till the end of the meeting, and I stood back at those kinds

> of meetings and talks ever since then, and I withstood every one of them.[24]

MacKenzie also formed a committee to organize a meeting of native religious leaders during the summer of 1970. The committee consisted of MacKenzie, Thomas, and Wilfred Pelletier, Odawa Ojibwa Director of the Institute of Indian Studies (later called the Nishnawbe Institute); by some accounts, it also included Willie and Ernest Tootoosis, Plains Cree religious leader. "Through Nishnawbe Institute in Toronto, they applied for money to support a 4-day meeting of interested Indians on the Crow Reservation in Montana." The Anglican Church provided a grant of $40,000 to fund the first Indian Ecumenical Conference, with the United Church of Canada and other organizations also making contributions; the money was used to defer the costs of transportation, food, and housing.[25] Snow, future host and organizer of the Conference, described the religious and social context for its genesis in his 1977 book <u>These Mountains Are Our Sacred Places</u>:

> As we look back over the past century, it has been like a long cold winter for my people as far as our religious life is concerned here on this Great Island.
>
> The sacred fire of our religion had almost been put out by people from foreign lands, who do not understand our belief in the Great Spirit, the Creator. If our sacred fire had been totally extinguished, indeed, we would have been a forgotten people who had once lived on this Great Island.
>
> The Christian Church came to us as one of the first representatives of the whiteman's society. Its missionaries preached a gospel of peace and brotherhood which we found congenial to our native beliefs. Because they came as men of God we believed they spoke the truth. We believed they described the role of their religion truly,

and we believed they interpreted the ways of the whiteman's government truly, we believed the advice they gave us was true and just.

Because we believed these things and then found them to be untrue, many of my people now question the Church and its mission. I still see a need for the Church in our native society, but a reformation is needed within the Church. The mission of the Church can achieve some of its original goals by studying Indian religion with an open mind, by reevaluating its position, and by starting a new kind of mission to the Indians.

Our people face tremendous pressures in adjusting to the modern society, and many of them are not able to cope with the new stresses. We see a rise in alcoholism; we experience a growing number of attempted and successful suicides among our young people; our traditional values are being undermined by the materialistic values of the wider society. The Church could help Indians develop programs to meet these serious problems, but it must first develop its own understanding of what it means to be an Indian in today's society. Historically, the missionary came to the reserves to help us adjust to a new way of life. Now, we need to modernize that noble objective, and the Church should continue to work with our religious leaders and serve our needs.

Again, there are numerous areas of practical life in which the Church could fulfill its social mission to the modern Indian. We need expertise in economic development and development in education materials. We need advice on modern technology, business, and social and cultural development programs. Certainly the Church could provide some of these things if it so wished.

But so far the established churches have shown very little interest in renewing their mission in terms of the real needs of modern life. For example, as we approach the centenary of Treaty Seven [1977], they want to keep as far away as possible and have as little to do as possible with commemorating this historic event.

Because of this and because it is becoming more and more clear that the revival of the Indian people must come from within our own heritage, it seems to me that our religious revival must also go back to our roots.

For the last one hundred years, a few dedicated native religious leaders and medicine men and women from many reserves and communities have kept our sacred fire going. They have been in close touch with nature, the animal world, the birds of the air, and the spiritual world. They still retain the ancient truth and religion of our forefathers. We are very grateful to those who kept the religious fire burning over the long cold century of indifference.

I was aware of this situation when I was in the Christian ministry. An Indian Ecumenical Conference had been talked about in the late 1960s by several Indian leaders. The men who organized a committee to arrange such a gathering were Dr. Bob Thomas, Wilfred Pelletier, the Reverend Ian Mackenzie, the Reverend Ernie Willie, and Ernest Tootoosis. They met in Winnipeg in 1969 and planned the first Indian Ecumenical Conference; it was held the following summer of 1970 at the Crow Agency, Montana.[26]

The Indian Ecumenical Conference at Crow Fair

The first Conference was held in the shadow of Custer Battlefield National Monument (recently renamed Little Bighorn National Monument) in August 1970, at the same time as the fifty-second annual Crow Fair. As one of the oldest and largest annual tribal celebrations, Crow Fair is widely known as "Teepee Capitol of the World." The 1991 Crow Fair announcement described it this way:

> In August, when the chokecherries are ripe, the Crow Tribe takes time to reunite with their families and friends, observing the full circle of the seasons. Thousands of Native Americans from all over the United States and Canada come together at the Campground in Crow Agency where they set up their teepees and join in a celebration of their culture. . . .

> During Crow Fair, morning begins at the crack of dawn with praise songs and announcements heralding the celebration. The clear voices of the camp cryers in the Crow language, arouse the campground, announce the days' events and remind all Indians to be at their best. . . .
>
> The Crow Fair Pow Wow is the biggest in the world. Over 10,000 visiting tribesmen take part in Traditional, Ceremonial, Intertribal, and social dances in the circular arbor.[27]

The Indian Ecumenical Conference was in session for four days (a sacred number for many tribes, representing the four directions). Ninety-three native religious leaders attended as official delegates, along with about 150 other participants; 47 tribes from throughout Canada and the United States were represented, including the Apache, Blood, Cherokee, Chippewa, Choctaw, Cree, Creek, Dogrib, Micmac, Mohawk, Nisga, Kwakiutl, Seminole, Shawnee, Suquamish, Stoney, Tlingit, and Yuchi tribes. Medicine men were responsible for selecting and consecrating the conference site and for conducting sunrise ceremonies each morning. Daily activities included "formal sessions" during the daytime and informal socializing during the evenings in what one writer termed "an old-style grand council, but on a scale hitherto unknown." An unexpected number of native youth, many of them from urban backgrounds, attended and "asked their religious leaders for action."[28]

Conference participants expressed their concern over native religious life and the various social and political factors affecting it.

> Chief Andrew Dreadfulwater, a Cherokee religious leader from Oklahoma, expressed a common mind in saying:

"We should have started something like this a long time ago. We have almost let all this religious squabbling smother our spiritual power and destroy us as a strong people." His sense of urgency was echoed by Bernard Second, medicine man of the Mescalero Apaches of New Mexico: "This may be our last chance. We will have to save our communities and revitalize them. We are, by nature, a people who look to our religious traditions to guide us." The Reverend Ernest Willie, an Anglican priest and a Kwakiutl Indian from British Columbia, took pride in the fact that "we are basically a very spiritual and religious people and this is just the beginning of [a] more general religious movement. I feel a religious mood growing, especially among the young." For Ernest Tootoosis, a Plains Cree from Saskatchewan and a follower of the Sun Dance, the need was not only to strengthen the medicine men but also to teach whites "how to live in our sacred land without polluting it and destroying ourselves in the process. When we had the responsibility of caring for this land, it was a Garden of Eden."

Randy Jacobs, the lone Choctaw delegate from Oklahoma, condemned the government policy of Termination and expressed the urgency of the situation, saying that "what is encouraging is a sense of renewed hope, rising from the act of communion and communal worship." An Anglican observer at the Conference wrote that these native religious leaders discovered "a community of interest. . . . Many of them found here for the first time, in ceremonial participation, a new commitment to serve their people."[29]

Conference delegates agreed to a series of resolutions addressing the need for religious freedom and tolerance:

1. We oppose all interference in the natural and sacred relation between the Indian people and the animals and birds which the Creator placed on this island for our physical and spiritual sustenance. By interference we mean

such things as requiring Indians to have a permit to hunt eagles, the disregarding of Indian hunting rights in Oklahoma, the encouragement of commercial hunting of caribou in the Northwest Territories, the promotion of sportsman hunting to the detriment of hunting for food by Indians, etc. . . . Conservation officers should consult Indian religious leaders about conservation practices.

2. We recommend that the governments of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah cease harassing members of the Native American Church.

3. We express the strongest disapproval of the perversion of Indian sacred dances for commercial purposes by unauthorized groups, the taking of the Peyote sacrament by non-Indians in a secular context, and all other mockeries of our ancient traditions.

4. We petition denominational authorities to permit those who work among Indian groups the freedom to use Native languages, traditions, dances, legends, and their own ancient religions as instruments of expression of the Christian life.

5. We request that mission activity be coordinated so as not to encourage excessive competition among sects in Indian communities.

6. We point out to the governments of the United States and Canada that our treaties with them are not secular contracts to us but sacred covenants, ordained and sanctioned by God, which guarantee our existence as people and which establish a sacred reciprocity among the Indian, God, the natural world, and our recent European brothers.

7. We encourage the teaching of Indian culture and language in schools. Non-essential educational standards should be waived so that Native religionists can be utilized in such programs.

8. We recommend that it be the policy of all public health agencies to work in cooperation with Indian medicine men.

> 9. We call upon the national church organizations to take specific action to ensure that all its members extend their respect and assistance to small Christian denominations, such as the Native American Church.
>
> 10. We oppose the indiscriminate desecration of our historic and religious monuments, burial grounds, and pictographs by universities, park services, the Army Corps of Engineers, Highway Department, and so forth. Indian religious leaders of the tribes involved should be consulted before any excavations of these sacred places take place. The sacred relics which are now in museums, and which were collected by quasi-legal and immoral methods, should be returned on request to the tribe involved.[30]

Despite the diversity of tribal and religious backgrounds represented at the Conference, delegates reached a strong consensus on the importance of religious harmony in native communities. The 1970 final report summarized their views of this situation:

> Everyone agreed that modern Indian religious life must be a furthering of the historic continuity of time-honoured Indian values and philosophical concerns; that both modern Indian ceremonies and Indian Christianity must be part of that continuity; and that both native ceremonials and Indian Christianity can be mutually supportive or parallel and co-operative or integrated according to the desire of the particular tribe involved. Most felt that the work of future Conferences would be to evolve a way of implementing this process.[31]

Sam Stanley, Director of the Center for the Study of Man at the Smithsonian Institution, attended the 1970 Conference and was later asked to serve as the official historian for the Conference; he described the experience in this way:

> Two important things happened at the initial meeting on the Crow Reservation in 1970. First, many Indians from

> tribes in Canada and the United States met and exchanged information for the first time. They spoke of their own traditional, as well as contemporary, religious ways. In the process, what I perceive as the basic Indian tolerance for others' religious experiences became the spirit of the meeting. Christian Indians acknowledged that being Christian did not negate the older truths by which their ancestors had lived. Traditionalists could tolerate Christianity as an adjunct to their own religion. Peyote was seen as another form of spiritual medicine suitable for its Indian practitioners. In truth, an ecumenical spirit permeated the meeting, and all present agreed to meet again in a year. This brought on the second consequence of the Crow meeting--an organization. The group asked Pelletier, Thomas, and McKenzie to serve as an executive committee for the larger steering committee of about 20 of those present at the Crow meeting. The steering committee would meet one or more times prior to the general meeting to discuss planning, financing, logistics, publicizing, and other matters.[32]

The Steering Committee was "almost equally divided" between representatives from Canada and representatives from the United States and included

> two leading members of the Native American church, a Shaker church member, a famous Baptist missionary, two Baptist laymen, one Catholic and three Anglican priests, a medicine man, and various native ceremonial leaders.[33]

Holding the Indian Ecumenical Conference at Crow Agency in August probably increased Conference attendance, but many delegates felt that the festive, noisy environment of Crow Fair--which includes parades and an all-native rodeo--was not conducive to a religious gathering. Chief Snow invited his colleagues to hold the 1971 Conference at his home reserve in Alberta, and this invitation was accepted.[34] Snow later reflected on his experience at the 1970 Conference:

> There was a good representation of native people from across the North American continent who took an active part at this historic gathering. There were Seminole Indians from the everglades in Florida, Micmacs from the eastern coast, Dogribs from the Northwest Territories; the tribes from the prairie provinces were also well represented. Concern was expressed about the future and the need to revive our native religion. There was also concern expressed about Indian language and culture, which are essential to our religion. At the end of the conference I extended an invitation to the religious leaders, medicine men and women, clergymen, and chiefs, to hold the next conference at the Stoney Indian Park in Morley, Alberta. The second conference was held there the next summer, in 1971, and has been held at the Stoney Reserve each summer since.
>
> After the first conference, I returned to my home reserve with a feeling of encouragement and realization that there were many Indian leaders who were concerned with the revival of our cultural, spiritual and religious heritage.[35]

With Snow and the Stoneys serving as Conference hosts, the Stoney Reserve eventually became the permanent home of the Conference, and it gradually came to be more closely associated with the Stoney tribe. The move also came at a critical juncture in Stoney tribal history.

The Stoney Tribe

Snow's home reserve is nestled in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains between Calgary and Banff National Park, along the Bow River. The Stoney Reserve is one of Canada's largest and most scenic reserves; in 1969 portions of the movie Little Big Man were filmed there.[36] The Stoneys (also called Assiniboines) were originally part of the Great Sioux Nation and most tribal members still speak the Nakoda language. The Stoney Reserve was established in 1877, when the Canadian government and a number of native nations signed Treaty Seven. Today more than two thousand Stoneys organized in three distinct bands live on the Morley reserve, where they rely on an unusual form of modern tribal government. Three democratically-elected band chiefs share leadership of the tribal council and most decisions are made by consensus rather than majority vote.[37]

The Stoneys first encountered Christian missionaries around 1658 when Jesuit priests, who wrote to their superiors about the Stoneys, passed through Stoney lands. It was not until the Methodists arrived in 1840, however, "not far behind the trappers and traders," that the Stoneys had the opportunity to investigate the religious traditions of the immigrant society. George and John McDougall established the Morleyville mission by 1875 and played an important role in the treaty negotiations two years later; although they pretended to advocate for the tribe's best interests, Snow has demonstrated that the McDougalls benefitted personally from the terms of the treaty. Stoneys living on the reserve and in close proximity to the mission nevertheless expressed "a great deal of interest" in the missionaries' teachings. Snow saw more continuity than discontinuity in the ensuing process of religious change and pointed out that "the period of discovering the Christian religion, like the entire process of meeting the whiteman and adopting some of his artifacts and ways, was a very gradual one for us."[38]

> If one understands the native religion of my people, it is not difficult to understand why so many of us embraced the gospel of Christianity. There was simply not that much difference between what we already believed and what the missionaries preached to us. What differences there were did not seem very important.
>
> The Christian concept of sharing was nothing new to us. In fact, it was the way of life in the Stoney tribal society. Our community was a sharing community--that is one of the reasons why we survived for so many centuries. We shared our food and clothing and held our land in common. The hunting grounds, the ceremonial grounds, the sacred mountainous area--all were held in common for the tribe.
>
> The concept of God as Creator was nothing new to us. The only thing that was different was the terminology. We call our God *Waka Taga*, the Great Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity--the Three in One God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit--was new but this was something that could be accepted in time.
>
> The other difference was the concept of the hereafter: the Happy Hunting Grounds or Heaven. There was a contrast between getting to the Happy Hunting Grounds and getting to Heaven. Are the Happy Hunting Grounds and Heaven the same place? But why worry about trying to convince each other if we both know how to get there? The concept of Hell in the hereafter was something entirely new to my people. There was no such word in our language. We had to invent a new word: *Wanari Daasi Ti* (the Bad Spirit's House).
>
> So there were questions regarding the new religion, but it sounded good and its basic teachings were not unfamiliar. Besides, we did not have disputes regarding religion. There were some disputes over hunting grounds and fishing areas, but not religion! We were aware of the diversity of forms of worship among the various tribes, but the Supreme Being was the Great Spirit. We had been taught not to question various forms or ways of

worshipping the Creator. Who were we to question? It was up to the Great Spirit and the tribe or the individual who was given a vision on the mountain top or other sacred ground. We were not there when the religious experience happened to the individual or group. Therefore, we felt we were not qualified to question or dispute.

Another theory among us is that in creating so much diversity in nature the Great Spirit revealed his love for diversity: the diversity of peoples, cultures, and languages, of animals large and small, birds of all colours, fish of all sizes, plant life so numerous, rocks as huge as the mountains and as small as the sands of the seas. Surely such a Creator would accept more than just one religion. Would he listen to prayers of only one conventional form of worship? Surely not. Besides, these questions must be too deep for finite beings--here but for one short season--to comprehend.

And so we listened to the missionaries and many converts were made.[39]

John Snow was born in 1933 on the Stoney Reserve, the fifth of eleven children. His father, Tom Snow, was Chief of the Wesley Band from 1949 to 1955 and a class leader and elder of the Morley United Church (Canadian Methodists had joined three other denominations in forming the United Church of Canada in 1925). John Snow attended the government-funded, church-operated residential school on the reserve, where

education consisted of nothing that had any relationship to our homes and culture. Indeed, Stoney culture was condemned explicitly and implicitly.

. . . These were confusing times for all of us when we were taught at home to respect the beliefs of our elders and at school to have disrespect for their values.

In later years when I was doing research work, I looked over the files of the teachers at the Morley Residential School. I found that the two teachers who taught when I

> attended were both non-certified. One had a high school education and the other had not even completed high school.

Snow participated in Stoney religious observances in the Sacred Lodge (also called the Sun Dance) while also attending church "quite regularly" and helping the missionary pastor. He travelled to Cook Christian Training School in Phoenix at the age of twenty-five, where he studied for four years and married fellow student Alva Townsend. After a year of seminary study in Edmonton, Snow was ordained by the United Church of Canada and served churches in Saskatchewan, Arizona and Alberta during the sixties.[40]

Snow returned home in 1968 to serve as minister of the McDougall Indian Mission Church at Morley. It was a time of tremendous change for the Stoneys. The Canadian government had just granted Canadian natives full citizenship (including the right to vote) and was actively integrating Stoney children into off-reserve schools in an effort to speed the assimilation process. Yet only three of the two thousand Stoneys were employed on the reserve. Most reserve homes were small cabins that were heated with wood-burning stoves and did not have electrical service until 1967; the telephone line would not reach the reserve until 1971. The Department of Indian Affairs was also preparing to introduce local reserve self-government in 1969, a move which Snow called "its most positive program ever." Snow had hoped to serve the community in his capacity as a religious leader, but he soon realized that the situation required effective political leadership as well.

Self-government might easily have ended up as another of Indian Affairs "successful failures," except that we knew we could not afford to fail once again. One protective force that helped us through the difficult years of adjustment and learning was the strength and wisdom of our elders. We were aware that the Great Spirit created us for a purpose and placed us on this Great Island. Our elders reminded us to have faith in the Creator, and that everything would fall into place as though it were planned.

Another protection was that from the time we accepted the idea of self-government we began to plan that the Chiefs and Tribal Council that would be elected would combine the best of the available talent and experience. The challenge of the modern age would be met under leadership that included both the traditional wisdom and experience of some of our elders and the administrative and "outside-world" experience of some of the tribe's younger, educated members.

As one of the latter--and perhaps because I was the son of a former Chief--some of the Wesley Band elders approached me not long after my return to Morley and asked if I would consider seeking the band Chieftainship in the upcoming elections of December 1968. At first, after discussing the matter with my family, I decided to remain with Church work where, I thought, I might best help my people. I had been appointed minister of the McDougall Indian Mission Church at Morley. While serving as clergyman, I intended to help my people, not only in spiritual matters, but in social and economic ways as well. The need for improved medical services, education, economic development, housing, and job opportunities presented a challenge I found impossible to ignore. At the time I was quite confident that the Christian Church would be involved in helping correct these many social ills.

Unfortunately, I came to discover the Church neither was fully aware, nor sufficiently understood the importance of modern Indian issues and problems. Furthermore, it didn't seem that the Church really wanted to become involved. Its main social concern seemed limited to the issuing of used clothing to my people.

> I think that the turning point for me came late one Wednesday afternoon when, during one of my pastoral visits, I stopped in at the Morley nursing station. Some Stoney people were waiting there for the doctor to come after he had seen patients at Cochrane [an off-reserve town], some twenty miles to the east. While I was talking to the people, the telephone rang; after a brief conversation the nurse in charge politely and apologetically informed those waiting that the doctor was not coming that day, but would be there one week later.
>
> Many of these people had no cars--one was a woman who had walked in with her sick baby on her back and was obviously worried. Clearly, the medical services were grossly inadequate, if not discriminatory.
>
> As a clergyman serving my people on the reserve, I had already approached Indian Affairs officials to point out my concern regarding the integrated education policy. Now I offered suggestions as to how medical services could be improved. Each time, however, I was simply told, "Keep to your preaching; we listen only to the elected representatives on the reserve."
>
> After repeated but useless attempts to talk with Indian Affairs personnel, I became convinced that unless I held elected office, I would never be heard and my concern for my people could only be a fruitless effort.
>
> Consequently, when several elders asked me to reconsider and run for the Chieftainship in our first elections under self-government, I accepted their advice and consented.
>
> I was elected and took office as Chief of the Wesley [now Goodstoney] Band in January 1969. Tom Twoyoungmen was chosen as Chief of the Bearspaw Band and Frank Powderface as Chief of the Chiniquay Band. With twelve Councillors, representing the three bands and three reserves of the Stoneys, we formed the first Tribal Council under reserve self-government.
>
> There was no shortage of challenges.[41]

Snow's philosophy of tribal self-government called for an honest, pragmatic approach to the problems facing the Stoneys, but one that also respects the integrity and viability of traditional values and practices. He termed this theory of self-conscious cultural development, involving both cultural revival and cultural appropriation in the midst of socioeconomic reform, "the way of *biculturalism*":

> As soon as we took office, the Tribal Council began to discuss many good ideas and plans for the future of our people on the reserve. But as we pondered them, we began to realize more and more how deep rooted our problems were and how deep rooted the solutions had to be.
>
> The basic problem, we realized, was to rebuild the shattered Stoney tribal society. It was a must to rebuild our once proud society if we were to be successful in the new venture.
>
> Part of the solution to this was that the harsh realities of the twentieth century had to be faced squarely by our people. We could no longer hide behind the none-too-benevolent dictatorship of the Indian Affairs Department and accept our miserable lot while bemoaning the loss of our traditional nomadic life. Alternatives to the traditional economy had to be found and programs planned and instituted that would provide a good future for our children.
>
> But, although we had to accept the dominant economy, technology, and legal system surrounding us, we did not have to accept all its cultural assumptions. The Stoney Indians' culture, language, and religion have been threatened ever since the white man arrived on this Great Island. With his excessive dependence on technology, restrictive legislation, greedy individualism, and smug certainty that he knows all the answers--even in religion--he has been a real and constant threat to our cooperative communal outlook, our respect for nature, and our value system. With the coming of self-government and a measure of self-determination, we did not have to accept this.
>
> In other words, we came to understand that it was not an either/or choice: acculturation to the dominant society or clinging to our old ways in a world where they could no

> longer offer us and our children a good life. We came to understand that there was a third way--the way of *biculturalism*. We came to understand that we could still follow Stoney tribal custom but, at the same time, adjust to a technological age on our own terms. Our hope was (and still is) to retain the best in the Stoney culture and to take the best in the dominant culture.
>
> We had no illusions that this would be an easy task, or a short one. We would have to take an embittered, despondent, confused people and point them toward rediscovering, recapturing, and revitalizing our cultural philosophies and values, while adapting this traditional culture to modern times. And to give our people the hope to do this, we would have to discover or invent employment programs and opportunities whereby they could put bread on their tables without degradation.[42]

One of the first crises the Stoney Tribal Council faced arose over its opposition to the integration policy affecting the reserve school. In August 1969 the Council called for a boycott of classes, which received strong support from Stoney families; after eight days, the Indian Affairs Department conceded to their demands for local control of the school. "Our victory went much further than the field of education. We began to get a feeling of what self-government was all about." The Stoneys were engaged in a number of legal, cultural and economic development projects by 1970. A tribal ranching cooperative managed a hundred head of cattle, while a newly opened sawmill brought employment to thirty-five men. One of the first new construction projects was a tribal administration building that was planned and completed in 1969. Tribal members also participated in linguistic, oral history and legal research projects, which led to the filing of formal claims for ancestral lands in the Kootenay Plains. Many of these projects were financed by natural gas royalties that the tribe began receiving at this time.[43]

The tribe also established a herd of twenty-five buffalo calves[44] as part of Stoney Indian Park, which opened in July 1970 and later became the home of the Indian Ecumenical Conference. An intensive study of the tourist industry in the area found that visitors to the Banff National Park and the Calgary area would support more recreational opportunities (Tom Snow was known to many in the area for his roadside teepee on the highway between Calgary and Banff, where he posed for photographs wearing a feather headdress). Stoney Indian Park is situated between highway 1A and the Bow River and includes a camping and picnic area, a playground, a re-created teepee village, and a roadside craft shop. The buffalo paddock runs along one edge of the park. Several religious sites are also located in the large park, including sweat lodges and a medicine wheel. The park was built with tribal funds and without government financial assistance. Today the championship powwow drum group from Morley calls itself the Stoney Park Singers.[45]

The Indian Ecumenical Conference at Stoney Park

The September 1970 issue of Canadian Churchman reported on the Indian Ecumenical Conference and other projects being supported by Canon Jones and the Anglican Church. Jones suggested that many General Synod delegates "did not fully realize the implications" of the Hendry Report recommendations they approved in 1969; their actions had "aroused great expectations among native peoples." He anticipated that challenging issues would be raised at the January 1971 General Synod as a result of the Crow Agency meeting. Conference representatives would ask the Anglicans "to recognize medicine men as religious and spiritual leaders of Indian communities" and to coordinate church work on an ecumenical basis.[46]

The 1971 General Synod heard from a number of speakers during the debate on Hendry Report progress, including Ahenakew and (now) Archdeacon Cuthand of Winnipeg (President of the Manitoba Metis Federation and author of the Preface for Bulletin 201). The General Synod promised native delegates a minimum of five years of funding to support Hendry Report recommendations, and also approved a resolution recognizing June 21 as a national "Indian Day of Prayer." This action came in response to a request by the Steering Committee of the Indian Ecumenical Conference that all churches acknowledge "the longest day of the year, the day in which the sun is longest and the highest in the sky, therefore closest to God." Ahenakew spelled out the implications of this action in his address to General Synod delegates:

> In other days this would have been called pagan. . . . Today, the North American Indian asks the church to recognize their earlier worship to the one great creator whom we knew 10,000 years ago.

The Canadian Churchman printed several suggestions for churches willing to observe this day, including a prayer by Father John Hascall, an Ojibwa Roman Catholic from Baraga, Michigan, who had been working for some years to incorporate his own tribal traditions into Roman Catholic worship services. The United Church of Canada also responded to the Steering Committee request and recognized the Indian Day of Prayer in 1971.[47]

Native People printed an announcement in its April 1971 issue for the second Conference:

> The Steering Committee of the Indian Ecumenical Conference would like to announce that the Second Indian Ecumenical Conference will be held, July 18-21, on the Stoney Reserve near Morley, Alberta. The Steering Committee once again most earnestly invites all American Indian religious leaders of all religious faiths to attend the Conference. Last year almost a hundred Indian religious leaders--Indian priests, ceremonial leaders, medicine men, Indian ministers, Indian doctors, chiefs--attended the First Conference at the Crow Agency in Montana. A few tribes did not have religious representatives at the meeting but we hope to have an even bigger turn out this year and to see every tribe in North America represented there.
>
> The meeting will start on the morning of the 18th of July. We will open the Conference with services early in the morning, so be sure and get there sometime on Saturday, July 17, so we can all start together the next morning.
>
> The Stoney people of Morley, Alberta are hosting the Conference. Their main reserve, where the Conference will be held, is in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, about 40 miles west of Calgary. They are providing accommodations (teepees, rooms, etc.) and feeding us. They hope to have wild meat for the delegates--buffalo, moose, etc.
>
> The Steering Committee has been able to raise some funds from the National Headquarters of different Canadian Churches. These funds will be used to help pay transportation for a limited number of delegates from different parts of Canada. We have not yet been able to convince the National Headquarters of American Churches to contribute money yet. As it looks now, we will not be

able to help pay the travel costs of delegates from the Indian communities in the United States. If you want to come as a delegate from your community maybe you could get your local congregation or ceremonial group to send you. If you simply want to see your tribe or community represented you might think about getting the people together, selecting someone as a delegate and financing his travel to the Conference. If you start soon, you could finance your delegate to the Conference by individual contributions, pie suppers, give-aways, raffles, etc. We are a poor people, but it seems like we can always dig up the money to do something we really want to do. And every North American Indian community has a right and a duty to be represented at this Conference. We don't want to make any hard decisions or take action unless the people are all represented.

The Steering Committee also wishes to encourage younger Indians to attend our meeting. Young Indians' participation in our Conference last year in Montana made everybody, both young and old, feel good.

If you plan to come to the Conference, you might keep in mind that Canada's most famous rodeo, the Calgary Stampede, will be held just before the Conference on July 10-17, 1971. Also, one of Canada's big Pow-wows, Banff Indian Days will be held just after the Conference on July 22-24, 1971. Morley is just half way between Calgary and Banff. For those who may be uncertain where this area is, Calgary is about 300 miles north of Great Falls, Montana, about 150 miles north of the Montana line.

Anyone who is interested in attending the Conference or wants some more information, write to: Nishnawbe Institute, 11 1/2 Spadina Road, Toronto 179, Ontario Canada.[48]

About 150 native religious leaders attended the 1971 Conference and the overall turnout increased to more than eight hundred, many of them young people. The delegates, one-third of them from the United States,

> were even more widely representative than before and embodied grassroots religious leadership which had both the social responsibility and the power to effect radical change. . . . The Conference followed much the same format as before with informal group meetings and discussions, personal testimonies, a sharing of concerns, admonishments to young people to return to their native traditions, talks on history, language, culture, and spirituality, prophecies, healing rituals, and traditional native ceremonies. An important new development was the holding of Christian services and these were well attended.

Participants were expected to dress conservatively and the use of alcohol and drugs was strictly forbidden. Conference delegates discussed a variety of issues affecting native people, including the desecration of burial grounds and other sacred sites[49] and the need for cultural education for young native people. Their primary concern, though was to develop the Conference into a permanent organization and to expand on a regional basis so that more native people could participate in the process of religious healing.[50]

A brush arbor served as the "spiritual centre" of the Conference, with a sacred fire kept burning nearby. Having established cooperative relationships the previous year, native religious leaders at the 1971 Conference were more comfortable sharing their religious traditions with one another. Anglican writer Janet Hodgson described some of the ceremonies performed:

> The Navajo began with a Blessing Way Ceremony to sanctify the meeting ground. The major traditional religious leaders of the Plains Cree tribes led a Sunrise Ceremony giving thanks to the Creator with pipe, sweetgrass, and sage. The Cherokee and Seminole delegation laid down the sacred fire in the arbour at the start and put it out at the finish, while the Stoney people

> held a Buffalo Welcoming Ceremony (something which had not been done before and was precipitated by the buffalo herd breaking loose). The gathering ended with the shaking of hands in the Creek and Cherokee manner and [participants] gathered up ash from the sacred fire in order to take blessings home with them.[51]

Prof. Harold Turner, a religion scholar and observer at the Conference, was impressed most by "the shared depth of concern for the spiritual renewal of the Indian peoples as having priority over all other approaches to the solution of their problems."[52]

The Anglican Church of Canada contributed $20,000 toward the costs of the meeting. Financial support during this period was also being provided by the United Church of Canada, Canadian and U.S. Catholics, the Episcopal church in the United States, and a number of congregations and individuals. Several of these groups soon stopped supporting the Conference, however, and began cultivating their own denominational native leaders, "who were not necessarily the natural spiritual leaders and were often the ones most against traditional religion and culture." Turner believed this provincialism was a result of increasing tension between the Conference's "all-Indian ecumenicity, independent of white controls, and developing in Indian ways," and the much narrower view of ecumenicism promoted by white mainline churches, "initiated from non-Indian sources, and organized and administered more on white cultural patterns than on Indian." He encouraged denominations to support the former approach:

> Whether [native religious leaders] had been formally appointed by denominations is beside the point, for it is the

> authentically Indian initiative and manner of operation that is the invaluable feature of this movement. When Indian spirituality in any form has found itself and can speak with confidence, then a new dialogue can commence with the white Christian community.[53]

* * *

The Steering Committee met with representatives of the Canadian Council of Churches in Toronto during the spring of 1972; they discussed the location and format of the third Conference. At a separate meeting, the Program Committee of the Anglican Church evaluated the first two Conferences and decided that they were beneficial to native people and worthy of continued support; they approved a grant of $10,000 for the 1972 Conference, which also received support from the United Church of Canada and the W. Clement Stone Foundation of Chicago. They also responded to a letter from the Ontario House of Bishops, which expressed concern over the implications of the resolutions passed at the 1970 Conference. The Program Committee reviewed and agreed to five of the resolutions and asked for clarification on another--which asked for cooperation between public health agencies and traditional medicine--though they apparently did not take a position on the resolution calling for denominational cooperation in native communities.[54]

The Steering Committee also met April 30 to May 2, 1972, on the Onion Lake Reserve in Saskatchewan. The group was addressed by Tootoosis, "coordinator" of the Steering Committee, who announced the national Indian Day of Prayer for 1972 and stressed the need for prayer. Delegates from Ontario, Saskatchewan and Alberta attended the meeting in order to confirm tentative plans for the third Conference, but a low turnout prevented them from making a final decision on the location and dates. The group presumably also discussed the aims of the Conference, which included: addressing the "mutual problems" facing native people; attaining "some form of harmony among the followers of both the Indian and Christian religions"; and reviving "cultural pride in the younger generation of Native people."[55]

By June the Steering Committee had decided to hold the Conference on the Stoney Reserve again, this time a month later, August 17-20, and beginning on a Thursday rather than Sunday morning. The Conference announcement printed in the June issue of Native People was very similar to the preceding year's announcement, with one significant addendum reflecting the growing attendance: "IMPORTANT! Due to difficulties in obtaining blankets, delegates must bring their own sleeping bags or blankets." Delegates and participants wanting information were encouraged to call phone numbers in Toronto (the Nishnawbe Institute) and Morley.[56]

Native people from throughout Canada and the United States again gathered on the Stoney Reserve for the 1972 Conference, which was beginning to receive increasing attention from the press. A two-page spread in Native People featured a dozen photos of Conference activities and participants. Pelletier, described as one of the "chief organizers" of the Conference, said that young people accounted for seventy percent of the overall attendance, which various estimates placed at from six hundred to one thousand people. A majority of the participants were members of Christian churches, with tribal traditions and intertribal groups also represented. Roman Catholic, Anglican and Native American Church services were held, along with traditional pipe, tobacco-burning and name-giving ceremonies.[57]

About 150 native religious leaders attended, including Snow, Tootoosis and Cuthand as well as Albert Lightning, Alex Bonaire and Joe Mackinaw.[58] As usual, discussions touched on a variety of issues such as pollution and the environment, native youth, alcohol abuse, the role of motherhood, interreligious dialogue and respect, and the importance of religious and cultural revival. Jim Dumont, who studied theology for three years but was not ordained, participated in the Conference after deciding that "the Christian way of religion was not where it was at." He found in traditional native religion a way of saying "you're proud of what you are and it's also a way of finding yourself." The Conference also attracted Canadian native personalities Jeanette Laval and Johnny Yesno.[59]

A New York Times article titled "Indians Reviving Religious Heritage" explored the complex religious experiences and interpretations growing out of the Indian Ecumenical Conference, which the article described as an event that "underscored the growing interest among Indians in their religious heritage." Snow observed that

> Our people are beginning to realize that we have a religious faith that is as good as any other. . . . After many years of seeing it condemned as pagan--and accepting such judgments ourselves--we are ready again to take pride in it.

Ahenakew used the Cree language and wore black vestments, the traditional religious color of the Cree, when he celebrated Anglican mass in a fire-lit teepee. In his homily he "spoke of Jesus Christ as the 'Holy Man' sent to put men in contact with the Great Spirit." Ahenakew was one of the religious leaders who took the position that "Christianity is now just as much a part of Indian religious identity as tribal religion"; he commented that "I'd like to go back 100 per cent, but I just can't. . . . The two must live in harmony." Tootoosis, meanwhile, argued that the disastrous effects of white Christian missionaries on native communities point to another conclusion:

> We were in a Garden of Eden when the white man came in 1492, but now we have been destroyed. We must go back to the way our forefathers worshiped. We must pray to the Great Spirit the way he wanted us to.[60]

While they were not willing to dismiss the important differences that exist between religious traditions, most of the native religious leaders at the Conference preferred to emphasize their similarities. Mackinaw said that while white Christians called native people "pagans" and "savages" in their churches, "this is not the way of Indian life. The Indian has no books or bible, it's what's in the heart that counts." He refused to criticize Christianity for this reason, and "attends some of their services since they are still praying to the one God, Manitou." Edward Fiske, the New York Times reporter, put it this way:

> Indian religious practices vary widely from tribe to tribe, but spiritual leaders say that all share certain common elements. Among these are belief in a single Great Spirit who created the world, tolerance of other people's beliefs and respect for one's neighbors and the natural order.
>
> Indian religions place emphasis on dreams and visions as means of receiving religious insight. They are closely linked to "Indian medicine"--a term that embraces both prayer and the use of curative elements like herbs and roots--and make no distinction between the sacred and secular realms.

Robert Thomas commented that "these people are grasping for some kind of structure and identity. . . . It may end up creating a new Indian religion."[61] While the Indian Ecumenical Conference meant different things to different people, it was a process of growth for everyone involved. A year later, Pelletier reflected on his experience at the 1972 Conference:

> Last summer in the Alberta foothills, there was an Indian Ecumenical Conference. It took a lot of effort and money for that to happen, but there they were, 130-odd Indian religious leaders from every part of North America. Medicine men and some Indian clergy. After nearly five hundred years of persecution, the old-way-of-life religions were still very much alive.
>
> For me, that conference meant many things. But there was one thing about it that was very personal: I had the feeling that I had come full circle and had finally made it. I felt like at last I was back home.[62]

John Hascall, the Ojibwa Roman Catholic priest from Michigan, "saw no contradiction between Christian and Indian spirituality," though he admitted that his local bishop had opposed his efforts at innovations such as outdoor mass and the use of his own language. Writer Brad Steiger, who read about John Hascall's experience at the 1972 Conference, interviewed him at his all-native parish in 1973:

> Steiger: Why do you believe that American Indians are beginning to commit themselves to a revival of native religious traditions at this time?
>
> Hascall: What happened is this: We have our medicine men, our holy men; we look in the past and we see the future; we look at the future and see the present. And we find that Christianity has been here since 1492 and it has not yet caught on with our people. There must be something wrong.
>
> We had a very religious people before the whiteman came. Now our children are disobeying their parents; they are committing suicide; they are doing all kinds of evil things which they never did before when we had our own religion. Let me say, if this is the way Christianity is going to be, we will have to go back to our old ways.
>
> Do you feel that the religious traditions of Europe or Asia can be compatible with native American religious traditions?
>
> If you mean European traditions with European rites, no. If you mean the Christian religion as Christ taught it, yes. I know both religions, and I see nothing incompatible.
>
> The essential message of Christ was love. Love has always been in our people. But a lot of the dogma can be irrelevant.
>
> Are you going to retain your status in the Roman Catholic Church?
>
> Yes, I will always be a priest. I will always be a Christian, an Indian Christian. Our two ways are compatible as religion, but not as rite.

How would you prefer to conduct mass in accordance with Indian tradition?

Mass wouldn't be celebrated every week. I would schedule big days of celebration. Within those days, I would serve the Eucharist.

You would make it a true agape, or love feast, then?

Right, as it was in the early days of the Christian Church.

It seems to me that you are talking about the possibility of blending Apostolic Christianity with the native traditions of your people.

Right, Apostolic Christianity as it was in the first century, or so. That is the true Christianity. There was not the bureaucracy that we have now.

I would say that now we are seeing the Holy Spirit bringing more relevance to the kind of nature religion that is the Indian way. This religion of the Spirit moving and working in all things was born in this country. It is the religion the Spirit gave to this country. We know that we have only one God and that His Spirit works in all creatures and all things, even the stones.

The Indian has his rites--the puberty rites, the marriage rites, the death rites. The Indian has a priesthood. I want to be able to see the Christian Church come forth and blend with the way our people have been doing things for thirty thousand years. The Lateran Council has recommended such action in other countries, but our bishop and our Church won't allow us to do it here.

Do you in your personal life utilize dreams and visions?

Yes, I use medicine myself. I follow both religions.

Do you have any particular techniques for inducing dreams and visions?

I would say it is through contemplation. He will speak when he wants to speak. It is not something I force. Twenty-five years ago, the young men of my tribe would go out and find our totem, our spirit vision. I never did it myself, though.

How do you deal with the Roman Catholic tradition of saints?

I would say saints are our elders. There are always holy people in the tribes. The saints are our grandmothers and grandfathers who are in spirit and who yet pray with us in our church.

Can American Indian traditions offer a workable faith for modern man?

I would say so for the Indians. The white people have their religion. As a whole, I do not think it is possible for a whiteman to adapt himself easily to the native traditions.
I do believe, though, that Apostolic Christianity, wherein one's faith becomes a total part of his life-style, can be made compatible with native American traditions. That is why I can be a priest. I know if the Spirit has led me this far, He has a reason for it.[63]

In 1986 Hascall became the first native president of the Tekakwitha Conference, a Roman Catholic organization founded in 1977 to coordinate native ministries.[64]

* * *

Snow was still Chief of the Wesley Band in 1973, when a letter to the editor of the reserve newsletter <u>Stoney Country</u> defended him from criticism by pointing to his accomplishments, among them the fact that "he has put Morley on the map by hosting the annual ecumenical conferences at the Stoney Park." The tribe continued to make progress in social and economic development; since 1970 they had opened a medical center and a recreation complex and had begun the Stoney Cultural Education Program, which quickly became a model for similar efforts on other reserves. The Program was founded in 1972 when two previous efforts--a language and literacy program assisted by Wycliffe Bible Translators and an oral history project sponsored by the Canadian government--were combined and expanded into a comprehensive approach to culturally-appropriate education. The Program led to dramatic improvements in job training and employment on the reserve.[65]

The Steering Committee decided to lengthen the 1973 Conference to seven days--July 30 to August 5--to allow more time for spiritual retreats and fasting in the mountains; participants were encouraged to arrive on "camping day," the 29th, since the Conference began with a sunrise ceremony on the 30th. The Conference announcement invited all native religious leaders and all native people to attend, since "in our experience we know that all Native people in [the] Americas have contributions [to make] in relation to their personal experiences." The Steering Committee promised free meals (featuring buffalo, moose, elk and deer meat) and lodging (including 25-30 teepees) to all participants, and they hoped to be able to pay transportation expenses for all religious leaders and their interpreters. Open forums under the brush arbor were to be held on several days, with intertribal powwow dancing each evening of the Conference. The announcement summarized the goals of the Conference:

> As you know, this gathering grew out of a concern about the pollution of the Americas. As we have observed,

> the influence of the technological age has polluted our waters and our air, has raped the land, has destroyed our brothers the animals, and it appears now that all life is in danger. When our old wise men chose to come together it was hoped that maybe once again we will have to make a contribution for the preservation of all life on this Island. The Great Spirit placed the Native people here to be the keepers of this Island and we are failing in carrying out our mission.[66]

Hodgson wrote that while "the first Conferences had a strong Christian presence," this soon gave way to the rising criticism directed toward the churches and anyone connected to them. Native Christian leaders

> valued the fact that they were able to function ecumenically with Christians of other denominations as well as traditional native people. Anglicans and Baptists shared services together, and Adam Cuthand recalls his pleasure at concelebrating mass with a young Roman Catholic priest from the north. But, according to Adam, there were power struggles among the traditional religious leaders which sometimes created tension:
>
> "They did not trust each other. They were afraid that one might have a bigger power, a bigger magic, than the other. I just ignored it, but I was conscious of the presence of a power of evil because of the struggle between them."
>
> But Adam got on well enough with one of these leaders to be invited to sit beside him during his ceremony. He asked Adam to pray and to explain to people what was going on in English.[67]

Gillian Lindgren covered the 1973 Conference for the Calgary Herald in several articles; he focussed on the growing tensions between traditional and Christian participants. He pointed out that the Conference was using the term "ecumenical" in a universal, inclusive sense and not in the more restricted way Christian denominations tend to use it, and that "if anything did not seem welcome at this week's conference, it was Christianity." Increasing rejection of the churches, especially by young native people, prompted the native Christian leaders present to keep "a very low profile and some were obviously uncomfortable during many of the discussions and meetings." The majority of those attending the sunrise ceremonies were young people, and they had many questions for the elders about fasting, healing traditions, and stories and prophecies. One youth commented that "whether you're Christian, Indian, Hindu or Moslem, we're all created by the same God, but we all have different ways of worshipping Him." Another argued that "we already have a religion of our own, why do we need to become Christians--it is not our way and God never intended that we give up our religion for another."[68]

Tootoosis continued to command attention as one of the Conference's most outspoken religious leaders; he actively articulated the growing criticisms of Christianity. Lindgren relied heavily on Tootoosis's perspective and quoted him extensively in two articles; some excerpts:

> Many of us are now getting important messages--God is telling the Indian people what they should be doing and how they should be conducting their lives--and many Indian elders are listening carefully and relating the advice to the young.
>
> It just isn't right for Indians to be Christian--God never intended it that way.
>
> God sent Christ into the world to give white people another chance because Adam and Eve did not live in harmony with

> nature when they were first put on this earth. . . . As far as we are concerned, we were still living in the Garden of Eden when the white man first came to this country.
>
> God will soon punish the white man, because he is beginning to think that he is God. He flies people to the moon, destroys the earth and pollutes the air and water. That cannot continue for too long without repercussions. . . . You just can't expect to keep taking and taking from mother earth--because every time you destroy something you are destroying part of the spirit of the creator.

Even Snow, who was still a United Church minister (though on sabbatical leave), expressed doubts about the future of Christianity among native people:

> We as native people have given Christianity every opportunity to flourish, and although it is sound theoretically, it just doesn't seem to work. . . . Maybe more than ever men need the religion of the Indian with its emphasis on harmony with nature, for if we are going to survive we must learn to live with nature and not try to control and pollute the whole earth.

Snow recognized this need for environmental consciousness among all people; he extended an "open invitation" to non-natives who were interested in attending the Conference.

> There is a growing awareness by non-Indians of the Indian religion. . . . They are starting to come around to a way of thinking about ecology and nature that we have been practising for a long time.[69]

* * *

The Anglican General Synod at Regina in 1973 formed the Sub-Committee on Native Affairs, which was initially composed of eight native leaders including Cuthand, Laura Black, Melville Hill and Bill McKay. The Sub-Committee worked with Ernie Willie, who continued to serve as the Anglican Consultant on Native Affairs, on a variety of native issues including the Indian Ecumenical Conference and the Indian Day of Prayer; it was charged with "a huge and difficult task":

> To evaluate and make recommendations on work amongst native people in all phases with a view to conceptually sewing together their fragmented sacred world in order that they may renew their earlier beliefs, experience a resurgence of the former qualities of life and remould the future, no matter what the future may hold.

Willie spoke to an Anglican women's group in Calgary in April 1974, telling them that "Jesus Christ was probably the best Indian that ever lived" because the principles he preached--sharing and caring--are so similar to the traditions of native communities; "Christ lived our way of life." He also asked them to support the native religious revival, suggesting that one of the "only ways to salvage the Indian people is to reintroduce a sizeable portion of their spiritual legacy."[70]

The Steering Committee held a three-day planning meeting in Winnipeg during February 1974, with Snow serving as chair and twenty committee members in attendance. The Committee set the dates for the fifth Conference--again selecting the week of the July/August transition, which became its annual dates--and discussed their goals and objectives. They reaffirmed the importance of continuing the religious revival, especially among the young people, but they also emphasized native people's role in cultivating environmental responsibility throughout society. Snow commented,

> If you protect nature now, you're protecting yourself in the future, and conversely, if you destroy nature now, you are destroying yourself in the future. The destruction of Mother Nature will make orphans of us all.

The 1974 Conference announcement printed in Stoney Country also stressed the need for native people to make their voice heard on the environmental crisis, devoting more than half of the text to this theme:

> A Hopi medicine man who attended a previous Ecumenical Conference summarized the importance of this Conference to all mankind: "Unless we help our White brothers, they are going to kill themselves and the earth with them."
>
> The Chairman of this year's Conference, Chief John Snow, agrees with this prediction: "Unless Indian philosophy is listened to, we are going to destroy ourselves on this earth at the rate modern society is going." This destruction is especially apparent here in our homeland--the foothills of the Rocky Mountains--where we see the environment polluted, where nature is no longer respected, where our animals are scarce where [once] they were plentiful. One of our main goals is to promote a deeper understanding of native culture and to bring together new and old religious thoughts. Chief Snow summarized his hopes and aspirations by saying:
>
> "Unless we try to protect the environment, unless we respect the creation of God, unless we respect people, as well as animals, we are doomed--the very hell that Christianity talks about will become a reality."[71]

Sam Stanley (citing Thomas) later wrote that by 1974 "four major foci" had emerged; he made no mention, however, of environmental concerns:

> 1. To build spiritual harmony among Indians of all faiths.
>
> 2. To solve the social ills among Indians, such as alcoholism and family breakdown.

> 3. To revive Indian language and tradition in those tribes that are losing them.
>
> 4. To educate Indian youth, especially city youth, in Indian history, culture, and languages.

Stanley went on to say that a number of issues, including pollution, "have also been discussed, but have never been given major consideration."[72]

About 1,500 people (ninety-five percent of them native people) attended the fifth Conference, where the Steering Committee named the Stoney Reserve as the permanent site for "North America's largest annual gathering of Native spiritual leaders." Indian News, a publication of the Canadian government, reported that the "international religious gathering" was

> one of the most important native gatherings in North America and is very widely attended. . . .
>
> To those who regard North American Indians as the "vanishing people of a dying culture," it is a challenge to see a people secure and content in their own ways given to them only by the Creator and to feel the growing spirit of inner strength of the Indian people through the expression of spiritual devotions.

A delegation of Australian aborigines and Fijians also participated in the Conference. Nevertheless, Willie argued the "the conference must realize that it has not encompassed as many tribal traditions as is possible, and if it is to be a true ecumenical endeavor it must begin to look at this." Funding for the 1974 meeting came from a variety of Canadian church and government sources: Anglican Church, $10,000; United Church, $10,000; Roman Catholic Church,

$5,000; Secretary of State, $20,000; and Department of Indian Affairs, $3,000 (down from $10,000 the year before).[73]

The Conference featured the customary morning and afternoon sessions under the brush arbor and intertribal powwows in the circular dance arbor each evening, which attracted people from local reserves and cities "by the carloads." Mike Mitchell and his travelling cultural college from Ontario performed Iroquois social dances; Dogribs from the Northwest Territories demonstrated their hand games and tea dances. A Ute religious leader from Colorado led sweat lodge ceremonies, and a traditional wedding and a naming ceremony were also performed during the Conference. Delegates discussed and approved resolutions addressing "the benefit and preservation of native religion as a whole." The Canadian Churchman reported that "most of the people came to share religious experiences, make contacts and learn ceremonial traditions from religious leaders." Tootoosis again emerged as one of the more vocal leaders:

> We can't return to the original Indian way of life and live like our ancestors did--hunting and fishing. But surely we can return to the God-given way of Indian worship of respecting the laws of nature and respecting elders and parents.
>
> The whole movement is to revive the Indian culture and spiritual life. Young Indian people won't get to know the way of life from the white society. There's an exterior darkness in the way of life between the two societies and that's why the younger people are behaving the way they are. They have lost their sense of identity.[74]

Outstanding leaders and contributors were honored at the Friday evening powwow, where Snow presented Anglican Primate Ted Scott with a pipe in appreciation for the support of the Anglican Church. Scott was asked to speak under the arbor earlier in the week, but he responded by saying, "I am not here to speak to you--I am here to listen." Ernest Willie later commended Scott's action to Anglicans as he invoked the language of liberation theology to describe the native religious revival:

> It would be well worth our while as Christians to so listen, for the native peoples of North America are moving slowly towards their own "exodus," and whether the church remains a valid, supportive part of this movement will depend on how willing it is to accept the contribution of a people who have retained a wholesome simplicity, many noble elements and majestic and inspiring ideals that can be claimed as qualities common to the best in other cultures.

Conference leaders praised Scott for his contributions, yet "most white observers left with conflicting emotions" having been the target of "some hostility and rejection expressed by some individuals," although there were also those "who offered friendship in an atmosphere of mutual understanding."[75]

Andrew Dreadfulwater, a Cherokee religious leader from Oklahoma and a founding member of the Steering Committee, participated in the 1974 Conference. "He was both a lifelong Christian, as a member of Cedar Tree Baptist Church, and a lifelong Keetoowah, as a member of the Redbird Smith stomp-grounds at Gore and as Chief of the Fire at Chewey."[76] Dreadfulwater dictated the following speech to anthropologist Kenneth Fink, who worked with him for several years; it was one of the few Conference speeches recorded and transcribed.

> I'm Andrew Dreadfulwater. I'm a Cherokee from Tahlequah, Oklahoma and I just want to say a few words.
>
> A lot of things have already been said since this meeting started. This is the fourth [fifth?] year talking about Indians surviving and it's just beginning, at this meeting, to go in the direction the conference was originally intended for.
>
> Many, many years back there was already a messenger here from God to show us how to use the things we want to use. When He first made the Indian He made the fullblood and the language. He didn't make overseas languages for the Indian.
>
> You see God's Law in everything He made. You see the Law in trees. You see the Law in birds. You find everything today as He put it--yet. Apples is apples. Peaches is peaches. You can't go to an apple tree and pick something that is half an apple and half a peach--yet.
>
> The birds--many birds--many different kinds of birds. In the south we have red, green, black, brown--all kinds of birds. If you find a redbird and look at its nest, you'll find redbirds. You'll never find different kinds of birds that live together--yet.
>
> This is no world that education can change. This is a God-given world. It is not a world that can be changed just because a man decides to. No white man's education has yet made trees grow upside down. No white man's money will get redbirds to share their nest with an eagle. That's the power we see today.
>
> And the same God who made things, made people. This is the Law teaching me in this world. I don't have to go to books and turn pages to find this Law. This Law is written down <u>here</u>--in this world.
>
> Many thousands of years were carried by God before the white man. The white man came almost five hundred years ago and it is still the same way as before he came.
>
> Now today we blame overseas people for the many ways he has harmed us. Yes, he did do us harm in many things. He harmed us with his treaties and from his

offices. And today many people think that we can use those government offices to get back what we want to know--to help understand Indian people who drifted away so long ago.

Many people today are talking about lots of dollars from whites and lots of education. No. All that money can do is get people together, like here--this meeting. That's good, but those dollars ain't got no way to get back to Indians what he lost. And education is just to help everybody buy bread, cars, house--that's good. I'm not against it. But it don't make no difference. It don't help to stay Indian.

Some reservation Indians get out of the reservation because of money--nothing wrong with that. Some people join different denomination churches. Some people go to big cities and live among rich people. All this is not interfering with God's Law.

I might say there's two educations you gotta take. One from God, the Spirit, and one from the schools. You learn from fire, birds and trees and everything that God made. From His things you learn what His rule is. And from humans, from school, you only learn what's gonna get you food, cars, house.

Because I believe in God I understand. If I didn't believe in God I wouldn't understand. We know all Indians are not gonna believe in God. God is not forcing people to follow His Law. It's up to people if they're gonna follow the rule or not. All God can do is use His own people and His own language to tell the truth. The truth about how He made things and how they should be used. God made the fullbloods to believe that way. But the rule for all living creatures is the same.

If what I have said is the case, then we Indians are gonna destroy the Indian, not the white man. The white man ain't got no way he can destroy the Indian. God's Law can't be destroyed. The white man can take away the Indian's land, but he can't take away that Law.

If we want to change to white people the Indian has got to do it himself. First we could stop teaching our own language. Second we could marry overseas people. Then by the third generation there won't be no Indian. We'll still dance, sing--have feathers in our hats--but we won't be no Indians.

That's my teaching.

Thank you.[77]

In his dissertation Fink recalled an experience with Dreadfulwater (who was also known as Comes Flying) at one of the Conferences; this anecdote sheds more light on Dreadfulwater's theory of cultural persistence.

I had asked Comes Flying about the proper ritual for starting a sacred fire. He had started the Fire at the Indian Ecumenical Conference the year before and Indian religious leaders of many different North American tribes were still talking of the "good medicine" and "power" of Comes Flying's Fire. He told me how it had to be started in the early morning with flint and certain specific materials. I asked him if he had brought flint from Oklahoma and he said no.

"Then I guess Canadian flint's just as good, huh?" I assumed.

"No . . . didn't use Canadian flint," he answered.

"Well, what'd you use?"

He laughed a little and held up his Zippo lighter. He gave the wheel a spin and said "That's flint!"[78]

* * *

Willie expressed concern about the growing fragmentation and disunity among native people, who he saw being divided along both organizational and reserve/urban lines, in a 1975 interview. He cited insufficient government funding for native political organizations and impatience by young people over lack of progress as the leading causes of the disunity. Willie viewed the rise of young, urban, militant movements such as the American Indian

Movement and the Ojibway Warrior Society as a self-defeating and potentially dangerous development.

> These so-called militant groups are made up of determined young people and their attitude is, "Our people are dying; we might as well die fighting."
>
> They are not endorsed by either the provincial Indian organizations, or the reserve Indians. And in my opinion it is out of the frustrating situation offered in these areas that these young people become militant.
>
> The two alternatives--live on a reserve or join a political group--are not ways in which they see they can fight for their people's rights. . . .
>
> They have something to say, but they are working against the oppressor and not for themselves as a people. The OWS and AIM are exciting alternatives for young people, more so than the Indian Ecumenical Conference where we concentrate on developing self-awareness. . . .
>
> We feel [the Conference] could reflect back to the people the image that is theirs; offer an anchor to the Indian in the city, and work with the reserves and political organizations in offering backup support if they would allow us to be their conscience.

Representatives of the Conference, who feared "possible Indian and non-Indian confrontations," approached leaders of the American Indian Movement in May 1975 for meetings.[79]

The Anglican Church again supported the 1975 Conference with a $10,000 grant. Willie acknowledged in a Canadian Churchman article that many Anglicans "feel apprehensive about the I.E.C. and its thrust"; he then offered them a brilliant interreligious rationale for their generosity: "Be assured, I find no conflict between Christ's teachings and our own. The cardinal law of my people is that man is no one until he learns to give of himself." (In a similar act of self-discovery and spiritual solidarity that belied his officially secular pretensions, the Secretary of State provided the Conference with $35,000.) Willie expanded on his view of the relationship between Christianity and native religious traditions at the Conference:

> God created all men and all creation. There was no super race. But Christianity has become so bastardized with cultural overtones as to be almost unrecognizable today.
>
> Right now if it is to have a place here at [the Conference], it must be one of learning, a posture of soul-searching. It would need a re-examination of the whole church.
>
> I am a Christian. I take it very seriously. But I've been hurt by it too, as an Indian. So have most of the people here.
>
> Some of them have to anti--that doesn't bother me, but it should be heard by the churches.[80]

More than eighteen hundred people, half of them under the age of thirty, attended the sixth Conference. Participants continued to travel to the Stoney Reserve from diverse--and often distant--tribal communities. Anglican observer Hugh McCullum wrote:

> They came from the Northwest Territories and Nova Scotia, from Montana and Colorado, from B.C. and Ontario, from New Mexico and Michigan; tribes like the Slavey and Ojibwa, Apache and Navajo, Micmac and Sioux, Huron and Cree.

McCullum described his experience at a healing ceremony, "one of the many spiritual events" that took place during the week. This particular ceremony was led by Plains Cree religious leader Albert Lightning, a member of the Steering Committee who had become a popular figure around Canada and the United States and was kept busy travelling to speaking engagements and workshops. The healing ceremony was conducted in a teepee one night, with women seated on one side and men on the other. It began with prayers offered in Cree and smoking of the sacred pipes. Participants then shared five traditional native foods: buffalo tongue stewed in chokecherry juice, smoked buffalo, saskatoon berries, "a kind of sweet paste," and tea. The long ceremony ended after everyone present, including four native Anglican priests, had the opportunity to pray in their own way.[81]

Tootoosis continued his outspoken criticism of white society, Christianity, and even native people themselves. He argued that "any liberation movement must be totally rooted in religion and culture," a view shared by some of the young native people in attendance. McCullum also interviewed Snow and described him as "harder on the church than some," though still receptive to a reformed Christianity. Snow explained his position:

> My colleagues [in the United Church] could never understand why I wanted to be independent, to live as an Indian with my own language and my own culture.
>
> The majority of society is collapsing under the weight of its own materialism. If the church is going to say anything to us, it has to stop conforming to that majority society, just as its founder had to.
>
> The church has always been political but on the wrong side. Maybe now, if it will side with us and support our causes, it will still mean something to my people.

Ahenakew, a lifelong Anglican now seventy-one years old, reflected on what the Conference had meant for him:

> I spent all my life working for my people and serving my Lord Jesus Christ. I worked hard for the Anglican Church. I still believe all that. I am still a priest. But

> about 10 years ago I began to realize as my life grew closer to its end that something was missing. I didn't know what.
>
> Five years ago I came to Morley. Three years ago I knew for sure what was missing. I didn't really know what it meant to be an Indian. Now I know. I am retired and now I can be an Indian and be a Christian, too, and I'm proud to be an Indian.

Conference leaders presented Ahenakew with a pipe in recognition of his contributions. He told McCullum that he had always wanted one, but had learned from the church that it was a "pagan symbol." His involvement in the Conference brought him a new perspective on the pipe: "I'm proud of this. It's part of my heritage. I will never lose that again."[82]

A new source of controversy emerged during the 1975 Conference. Film crews from the National Film Board of Canada were on hand filming People of the Sacred Circle, a half-hour documentary on the Conference, and their intrusive presence offended some people. McCullum wrote that "when it rained every day, as never before in six years, some saw this as an expression of displeasure by the Creator because the sacred things were being filmed." The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation broadcast the film in November 1975 as part of its popular "Man Alive" series on religion and society.[83]

* * *

Willie conceived and organized a meeting of native organizations and Christian churches that took place in Orillia, Ontario, during the summer of 1976. Ninety representatives from the National Indian Brotherhood, Native Council of Canada, and Inuit

Tapirisat of Canada participated, along with sixty representatives from the Anglican, Baptist, Mennonite, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic and United Churches and the Salvation Army. The participants discussed how they might "present a united front on native affairs" and passed resolutions asking the churches to work at understanding native religion and culture and to advocate for native women's rights.[84]

Snow recorded the history of the Stoneys' struggle for political, cultural and religious survival in his 1977 book <u>These Mountains Are Our Sacred Places</u>. In a chapter titled "The Indian Religious Movement," he depicted a typical sunrise ceremony at the 1976 Conference:

> The sun rises with a blood-red headdress of prairie clouds throwing fiery colours to the mountains. Smoke rises lazily from the teepee fires. All the living things awake around the Indian religious camp in the foothills. A lonely eagle rides the air currents, almost out of sight. Half a mile away a buffalo bull welcomes the day as he calls to his herd. A magpie announces his arrival with his chatter as he teases an old dog lying beside the teepee entrance. Below the huge teepee encampment, the rustling mountain streams can be heard. A tethered horse whinnies and stamps his hooves, and a grasshopper joins in the medley of sounds and activity of a new day.
>
> From out of a teepee an old man stoops, carrying his pipe bag carefully. He calls out and is joined by four or five men as he walks to a small hill overlooking the camp.
>
> On the hill, the men arrange themselves in a circle. The old man offers a prayer to the Creator, a daily thanksgiving for the glory of another summer day, as he lights the braided sweetgrass and prepares the pipe.
>
> The mountains seem closer in the morning light, enclosing the whole valley in a great cathedral which the Great Spirit built for Himself and His people. The old man's

prayer speaks of the Creator's love and His protection for His red children. The pipe, now lit, is passed from hand to hand, with *reverence*, speaking of the unity and brotherhood of all in the Great Spirit's creation. In each hand the pipestem is directed to the four winds, east, south, west, and north, acknowledging the dominion of the Creator, and only the Creator, over all things. In this way man acknowledges, with humility, that he is only a part of the Creation, that he is dependent, that he, too, must submit to the natural laws of the Creator. The herbs in the pipe are consumed, the ashes are knocked out, the pipe is returned to the bag, and the men stand and return to their families in their teepees to break their fast.

Ten thousand years ago? Perhaps a century? No! This occurred last summer and the summer before and each summer for the past six years. The man and the eagle and the mountain streams are real. The setting is Morley: the home of the Indian Ecumenical Conference.[85]

Snow went on to describe another highlight of the Conferences, the Friday evening powwow.

At this time, in traditional fashion, outstanding leaders are presented peace pipes, buffalo robes, headdresses, and other Indian things. Some of the better known recipients have been Andrew Dreadfulwater, Cherokee, from the North West Territories; Clifford Hill, Creek, from Oklahoma; Ernest Tootoosis, Cree, from Saskatchewan; Ernest Willie, Kwakiutl, from Toronto; George Erasmus, Dogrib, and Eddie Box, Ute, both from Colorado; Stewart Etsitty, Navaho, from Arizona; Wilfred Pelletier, from Vancouver; Don Marshall, Mic Mac, from the Maritimes; the late Andrew Ahenekew, Cree, from Saskatchewan; and Jake Rabbit, George Ear, and Horace Holloway, Jr., Stoneys, from Morley.[86]

Snow described the trip to Morley for native people "from all parts of North America" as an "annual pilgrimage," and more people made the pilgrimage to the 1976 Conference than ever before, despite the fact that rain fell for most of the week. The sacred fire could not be lit until Tuesday, and more rain beginning that evening prevented any additional meetings until the Morley hockey rink was opened on Friday. Nearly six thousand people took time to register, a crowd much larger than the Stoney hosts had anticipated; "the line up for one meal led into the next and our cooks far exceeded the call of duty." Approximately seventy percent of the participants were between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five. Donna Kisto, a Pima student, expressed commonly-held views:

> I am an Indian. My hair is black and my skin is brown, but I feel no inferiority before the whiteman. Brown is the color of the earth. Black is the colour of the sky before the life-giving rain falls. As the soil and rain bring forth food for life, so must I, the Lord of Nature, bring forth good into the world. All Indians are blessed at birth, with the precious heritage of independence and pride. Like a costly gem, this precious heritage must be treasured.

A report from the Steering Committee stated:

> Our hopes and aspirations have finally been achieved, the bringing together of the young so that they may receive instruction from our elders. Yet we must be cognizant of a question of communication that has still to be answered. Our elders learned the old Indian way while our young were taught in residential schools and both sides need to understand where each other is in terms of effecting a good teacher/learner situation.
>
> The young who have caught on to the difficulties made apparent by two schooling systems have gained a measure of their own worth which has made the dream of the conference all worth while.

The Conference may have been a turning point in other ways as well; in an article titled "Morley . . . Different Things to Different People," Native People reported that

> In the past, there has been considerable ideological conflict at the conference between the organized churches and the Native spiritual leaders. But this year the people attending the Morley conference heard the Native concept of religion. This is a change that seemed to stand well with the audience.

Native hospitality still prevailed, however. Ruth Blaser, a non-native woman present at the Conference, reported that her Lutheran group stayed in a teepee lent to them by Tootoosis (though they did have to spend part of the first day patching the teepee). Andrew and Alice Ahenakew camped next to the Lutheran group, and it was to be Andrew's last Conference; he died in November 1976.[87]

Willie wrote Andrew's obituary for the Canadian Churchman; they first met as founding members of the Steering Committee. Andrew's life illustrates the kind of impact the Conference had on many native Christians, particularly those who had not felt the freedom to participate in their own tribal religious traditions. In a talk at a gathering in Winnipeg shortly before his death, Andrew described his religious background and the vision that changed his life, which he called "the most peculiar story of an Indian clergyman in North America." His father would not allow him to participate in traditional ceremonies as a child, a decision which "baffled" him, and before he attended the Conference he was a "brainwashed" Anglican priest. After travelling to Crow Agency and to Morley, however, he realized that "there was something lacking."[88]

Andrew's bishop sent him to Manitoba during the spring of 1973 to evaluate a native ordination candidate. Andrew's brother Walter had just been brought home, dying from cancer, and on the first night of his trip Andrew found himself alone in a motel at The Pas, afraid that Walter would die before he returned home. Andrew was visited during the night by a great white bear from the north, "a beautiful creature" sent by "the higher power," who showed him how to make medicine using the bear's body. Alice described Andrew in an interview after his death as "a man of visions," but always ones with Christian motifs and interpretations. Andrew refused to believe the vision of the bear or its implications.

> I woke up. I put the light on. I looked at my clerical collar, it was on the table. I thought to myself, Andrew, are you going crazy? You are crazy! How are you going to do it--to be priest in the Anglican Church and to be a medicine man? So I went to sleep again.

Andrew told Alice about the experience when he returned home, and she was more willing to believe it than he was. They were unable to find the ingredients for the medicine because it was the wrong season, and Walter died, but in the meantime Andrew's brother Austen also became seriously ill. Several months later they located a bear and made the medicine; the brother asked for some and soon made a full recovery.[89]

Native people from all over Canada soon began to visit Andrew for medicine, while others kept him informed of bears that became available. Andrew conducted healing ceremonies in a teepee next to their home at Sandy Lake, where he administered the Cree medicine even as he healed "in the name of Jesus." Hundreds of people, including some whites, had come for healing before Andrew summoned the courage, a year and a half later, to tell his bishop about the vision and his newfound ability to heal. Andrew went to the bishop willing to surrender his clerical collar, but after hearing the story the bishop encouraged him to continue practicing something that early Christians also experienced. Andrew concluded his talk to the Winnipeg group by declaring his fidelity both to his Cree ancestors and to his forebears in the Christian church.

> So, my friends, this is the story of Andrew Ahenakew, who was angry when the Indian culture men told him that the Indian way of worship is real; it is real, I helped them, but again I didn't help them, but the great Creator, God. People come there with trembling hearts, heart diseases, mental diseases, half-crazy. Withered hands have been made whole. Legs are walking again. . . .[90]

The American Indian Movement was "visibly represented" at the 1976 Conference, and their request that one day of the gathering be set aside to memorialize Nelson Small Legs, Jr., became another source of controversy. Small Legs and Roy Littlechief had been AIM leaders in Alberta and were subjected to "constant surveillance" by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Their harassment escalated in February 1976; after the arrest of Leonard Peltier three weeks earlier, the RCMP began "a general round-up of AIM members in western Canada." Small Legs committed suicide on May 16th "in protest to the Canadian government for its treatment of Indians for the past 100 years." He was eulogized in both traditional and Christian ceremonies, and the funeral became both an AIM rally and a media event. His brother Devalon called him "a warrior. The greatest thing for a warrior is to die in battle. My brother died fighting the system." Cree leader Ed Burnstick said Small Legs "has brought Indian people together. He has shown us the first step." Elders at the Conference, however, refused AIM's request for a memorial; Native People reported they "felt that 'it wasn't the Indian way' and that they didn't want to 'encourage that kind of thing.'" Members of AIM--including at least one Stoney, Don Rider--conducted an armed takeover of the Stoney Tribal Offices in September, though charges were never filed in relation to the incident. AIM sponsored the Nelson Small Legs Memorial Powwow in 1977 and developed their own "Elders and Youth Conference," under the leadership of Muscogee religious leader Phillip Deere, in 1978.[91]

* * *

A press release on the 1977 Conference announced that the dates had been set for July 31 to August 7. Participants were again promised accommodations and meals, but the large attendance the year before had stretched Conference resources "to the limit"; people were encouraged to bring their own food if possible, particularly breakfast. They were also asked "to respect the sacred nature of the conference and leave all drugs and alcohol at home," and those planning to participate in traditional religious ceremonies were encouraged to fast beforehand.[92]

More than 1,500 people attended the eighth Conference. The success of the Conference over the years may actually have contributed to this decline in attendance; by 1977 several regional gatherings patterned after the Indian Ecumenical Conference were being held, including two during August in southern Manitoba and northern Ontario. Buck Drywater, a Cherokee religious leader from

Oklahoma, attended "Indian Ecumenical Councils" in Ontario and returned home with plans to organize an "ecumenical medicine council" composed of traditional (Sacred Fire) and Christian (Baptist) religious leaders. The new organization would "reunite Cherokees in all communities and work for common concerns," involving both religious and political issues.[93]

Navajo religious leaders Tommy Nez and Stewart Etsitty led the opening ceremony to light the sacred fire at the 1977 Conference (Etsitty is a leading peyotist among the Navajos and in 1946 was a founding trustee of the Native American Church of the State of Arizona). A Mennonite observer commented that "The fire was compared to 'the sacred fire of our religion which was almost stamped out by foreigners.'" Speakers at the brush arbor talked about the need for a balance between political activism and spiritual awareness. They also warned people about the dangers of alcohol, but the sight of "broken beer bottles littering the ground" indicated that some participants had not heeded their advice.[94]

Willie resigned his position with the Anglican Church in the fall of 1977 so he could serve as the Chief Administrative Officer for the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs. He was replaced by Archdeacon Cuthand, who had been involved in the Conference since its inception.[95]

The Indian Ecumenical Conference continued to decline in popularity and attendance in 1978. A major split between organizers developed at the 1978 Conference, which a "conference insider" attributed to Snow's refusal to allow Alanis Obomsawin, who was filming her documentary Mother of Many Children, to interview Jeanette Laval at the conference site. In an article on the 1979 Conference titled "Religious Conference Fizzles in the Drizzle," Native People reported that the Conference, which "had been touted in 'Indian Country' as 'the' place to go during the summer," had "lost its appeal after a short lived trendy reign as Canada's national Indian gathering." The 1979 Conference was organized by Snow and Donna Deward; the Nishnawbe Institute was no longer involved. Some participants said that attendance was better than it had been the year before, but the Conference was still "plagued with low attendance, rain and disorganization." Participants from near and far expressed disappointment at the turnout. Lightning conducted a number of ceremonies and the Indian Travelling College performed, but the brush arbor was empty most of the time and the evening powwows, held under a big top, were small.[96]

The Steering Committee met in October 1979 at Williams Lake, B.C., with Snow chairing the meeting. Etsitty reported that the Conference was "going in the right direction" and that some Navajos who attended had revived sweat lodge ceremonies and powwows in their home communities. Mike Mitchell pointed out the problems created by the presence of non-native healers and by the participation of whites in sweat lodges ceremonies. Snow suggested that they prepare a leaflet which could be given to non-native observers explaining their role at the Conference, a project later undertaken by Willie. Eddie Box pointed out that some young mixed-blood native people do not look native and are sometimes rejected by their own people.[97]

Snow discussed some of the problems that had arisen in organizing the camp and suggested they arrange for a camp director, a camp planning sub-committee, a powwow M.C., and a workshop on camp security. Cuthand submitted the financial report for the 1979 Conference. Funding had been received from four sources--Secretary of State, $30,000; Indian Affairs Branch, $5,000; Anglican Church of Canada, $10,000; and Stoney Tribe, $15,000--but there was still a combined deficit of $7,500. The Steering Committee decided to form a sub-committee on fund-raising, which met the following month in Vancouver. They discussed a variety of strategies for generating more funding and considered the possibility of hiring a full-time fund-raiser.[98]

The Steering Committee's Summary Report for the 1981 Conference called it "The Morley Conference for Indian Spiritual Life" and stated that it was planned by a "Council of Elders" and organized by a coordinator with an "extensive" volunteer staff. The Steering Committee reported that the Conference was "succeeding in its goal" of facilitating the ongoing native religious and cultural revival, and reiterated the need for such an event.

> The beginnings of the Conference are deeply rooted in the spiritual history of this Great Island. Prior to the arrival of the Europeans, many of our elders had been given visions of white-skinned people who would come with a good message. The message they brought was about the Creator sending His Son Jesus to earth to give His creation hope, and it made sense to our elders, and they believed.

> But our elders became disillusioned with the exploitative and oppressive institution the Europeans had built around the Great Spirit's Son--the institution called "the Church," or "Christianity." The institutional church talked about faith, hope and love, but in practice, seemed to be leading us in paths of unbelief, despair, and denominational divisiveness and hatred. Our elders who had long known what it was to walk by faith became increasingly concerned that the institutional Church was robbing them of spirituality, and was not living in harmony with the Jesus they preached. Conference Chairman, Dr. John Snow, a chief of the Stoney Tribe, put it this way:
>
> "When the white missionaries first came, instead of calling our religion and our language pagan, they should have told us that the Great Spirit whom we had so long worshipped had made Himself known to all peoples in His Son Jesus."
>
> Our elders accepted our languages and culture as gifts from the Creator, not as His enemies. Our elders believed that all of life--the powwows, the language, the harmony with Nature--could be used to give thanks to the Creator.[99]

The Conference continued to meet annually until 1983, though participation gradually decreased until attendance "had dwindled to a few hundred and the sacred fire had to be put out two days early because of lack of interest." After the 1983 Conference Snow was quoted as saying that "people are taking pride in their Indianness," but a combination of factors had led many of them to express their pride by participating in other tribal, regional and denominational gatherings.[100]

* * *

The Indian Ecumenical Conference at Stoney Park did not meet for the next three years, but a lightning strike in the summer of 1986 prompted a revival of the gathering the following year. In past years the Conference hosts had customarily slaughtered a buffalo and used the meat to help feed Conference participants. When three buffaloes in the Stoney herd were killed during an electrical storm, at the time when the Conference had been held in the past, it was interpreted as "a sign from the Creator that the conference is needed again." Snow said, "it's time to start up again. . . . And besides, we've had a lot of requests for it." The 1987 Conference was scaled back to a four-day schedule, July 27-30, and participants were responsible for their own food. An editorial in Windspeaker encouraged native people who were concerned about religious and cultural revival to attend.[101]

Albert Lightning led a pipe ceremony as the sacred fire was lit on the opening of the day of the fifteenth Conference. Snow had expected attendance to be low for the revived event, but on the second day "cars rolled in" and "attendance swelled." Snow echoed the concerns of Lightning and other religious leaders and elders present when he opened the Conference by encouraging everyone to revive the spirituality of their ancestors.

> In this time when there is so much trouble in the world and destroying of mother earth, Indian people have a role to play. We can teach others about living in harmony with Mother Nature. I invite anyone to come up here and share teachings and spiritual experiences.

Jerome Four Star of Montana emphasized the importance of having young people present at the gathering:

> The young people have to know the Indian traditions that were given to them long before the white man came to this country. . . .

> Some might think that these spirits have abandoned us--what with all the bad things that have been going on in the Indian world. But, these spirits have always been with us. It is we who have forgotten about them.

Glen Douglas, a veteran of three wars from British Columbia, told about his recovery from alcoholism--"It was the teachings of my elders that got me through. I had good teachings."--and asked others to be open to these teachings. Archdeacon Cuthand, a member of the Steering Committee, urged people to approach spirituality "in a wholistic way" and said that "an educated man without spirituality is a dangerous man."

> The penitentiaries are often 50 percent filled up with Native people. In some cases, in the female prisons, they are 100 percent filled with Natives. And it's getting worse.
>
> The time has come to go back to our own Indian people and Elders for teaching. We have lost something and we must get it back.

Snow hoped that the Conference would again grow to the point where "we have people coming from all over the continent and other lands."[102]

The announcement for the 1988 gathering, "The Sixteenth Morley Ecumenical Conference for Indian Spiritual Life," set the dates for July 25-28 and invited people to Stoney Indian Park.

> The responsibility of learning and growth is on the participant. For fifteen years the Morley Steering Committee and the Elders have provided the arena for this to happen. And it has happened--many, many people have been influenced by the spiritual atmosphere. People have returned home from Morley bringing with them a sense of pride, knowledge and understanding of what it is to be

> Indian. Come to rediscover the wisdom of your elders, your heritage and learn to live in harmony with the Creation.

An "ACTIVITY AGENDA for cultural, spiritual and self awareness" outlined the events which, during the past fifteen gatherings, had come to be associated with the Indian Ecumenical Conference:

> 1. Sunrise Ceremony each day by a different tribal representative who will also be responsible for Pipe ceremonies, sweetgrass, sage, etc.
>
> 2. Special meetings [and] discussions on serious issues such as culture, language, history and prophecies by native elders.
>
> 3. Under the arbour talks on spiritual fulfillment.
>
> 4. Special tipi area for youth meetings.
>
> 5. Special area for Healers.
>
> 6. Special ceremonies, sweat lodge ceremonies, Departed souls ceremonies.

Attendance was low for the 1988 Conference, and in May 1989 there were still no definite plans for the gathering that summer, though organizers were hoping to plan separate camps for native youth to run concurrently with the Conference.[103]

* * *

Freelance journalist Nora Schmidt interviewed Snow during 1991 as part of a thirteen-part series, "Stoney Stories," for the local Canadian Broadcasting Corporation affiliate. They discussed Stoney culture, philosophy and religion, and in the course of their conversations Snow mentioned the importance of the Indian Ecumenical Conference. Snow and Schmidt talked about reviving the

Conference, and after Snow consulted with some elders (including members of the Steering Committee) they decided to organize a gathering for 1992. Planning for the "1992 North American Indian Ecumenical Conference" began on January 8, 1992; the Conference would be held "in recognition of the International Year of Solidarity among Indigenous Peoples" declared by the United Nations, and would mark both the 125th year since Canada's Confederation and five hundred years of survival since the arrival of Christopher Columbus. The Conference dates were set for July 27-30 and organizers anticipated that as many as fifteen hundred people would attend. Funding was provided by the Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs and five corporate sponsors, though the target budget of $60,000 was not reached.[104]

The Conference opened on Monday morning with the lighting of the sacred fire and the blessing of the grounds in ceremonies performed by Navajo Native American Church leaders Tommy Nez, Stewart Etsitty and Joe Bia. Jerome Four Star, an Assiniboine pipe carrier from Montana, then performed a pipe ceremony. Participants gathered at the arbor each morning and afternoon for open teaching sessions, where all native people were encouraged to speak out of their own personal experiences. Other ceremonies and gatherings also took place during the four-day event: sunrise ceremonies, peyote drumming, sweat ceremonies, a women's talking circle, teaching sessions with the youth, and an evening powwow on Wednesday.

People began arriving on Sunday and Conference attendance grew slowly until more than three hundred were on hand Wednesday, with about 220 taking time to register at the welcome table; approximately seventy-five percent came from Alberta, fifteen percent from the rest of Canada, and ten percent from the United States. Several Chilean natives and a Maori man from New Zealand also attended. The Steering Committee and other elders met in Snow's teepee at noon on Tuesday and Wednesday to discuss the future of the Conference. On Thursday morning Snow announced that they had decided to hold the Conference again, probably in 1993, and he acknowledged the members of the Steering Committee: Nez, Etsitty, Four Star, Adam Cuthand, Bill Erasmus, Lawrence (Raven) Mackinaw, and Richard Lightning. The Conference closed as Four Star performed another pipe ceremony and Nez put out the sacred fire.

Theoretical Perspectives on the Indian Ecumenical Conference

Religious leaders and other native people who participated in the Indian Ecumenical Conference believed that the question of religious identity is one of the central issues facing native people today. Contemporary native religious identity, which is imagined and formed, expressed and maintained in the context of religiously diverse communities, is complex and multidimensional and should be examined from a variety of theoretical perspectives.

The three most important features of the Conference are symbolized in its name; the name "Indian Ecumenical Conference" points the way to a theoretical discussion of contemporary native religious identity. As an "Indian" event, the Conference was an intertribal gathering involving native people from both Canada and the United States. As an "Ecumenical" organization, the Conference formalized an interreligious community involving native people from both traditional and Christian religious groups. As a "Conference," it was both an annual event and an ongoing association which became an important religious movement among native people. In the chapters that follow I will examine the Indian Ecumenical Conference from these three theoretical perspectives.